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## ENG 3705-001: Multicultural American Literature

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**Multicultural American Literature**  
**English 3705–Spring, 2007**

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 Course listserv: [3705s07@lists.eiu.edu](mailto:3705s07@lists.eiu.edu)  
 Office hours: 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. Tues/Thurs,  
 and by appointment

**Required texts:**

Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks* (1934)  
 Richard Wright, *Savage Holiday* (1954)  
 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970)  
 Arturo Islas, *The Rain God* (1984)  
 Vikram Seth, *The Golden Gate* (1986)  
 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (1992)  
 Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (1995)  
 David R. Roediger, *Black on White* (1998)

**COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

(read the following carefully; these words constitute our contract,  
 and I will request your written agreement to them)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

America's literary canon has expanded to include a number of significant non-white writers. Like authors who write from other identifiable or self-proclaimed minority positions, these writers tend to be read in search of insight into their own supposed group experience. The writings of African American authors, for instance, are often read as windows into "the African American experience," and the same limiting expectations are faced by Native American, Hispanic, or Asian American writers. In this course, we will consider writings by non-white authors who bravely resist such pigeon-holing expectations by writing on subjects outside of their own supposed group experience.

In particular, it may surprise you to learn that a great deal of non-white intellectual energy has been devoted to understanding the complexities of white experience, and of white power. In part because those Americans who have been labeled "non-white" have had much to fear from those who have been labeled "white," many non-white writers have provided penetrating insight into the thoughts, values, and behavior of America's racial majority. These are insights from which even whites themselves can learn. As we will see, such writings can also help us understand the broader significance for all Americans of centuries of white supremacy.

Our course will be conducted as an inquiring conversation on these matters, with your active participation central to our work. Because the success of our conversations will depend so

heavily on everyone's participation, it is crucial that you keep up with the reading, and that you do so with careful attention. In fact, we will begin many sessions with a reading quiz, primarily intended to insure that you maintain attentive reading habits. Finally, be forewarned that you may be expected to leave some of your "comfort zones"—some of your fundamental beliefs might be challenged, and we may have some heated discussions about issues that many Americans prefer to avoid.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

- To gain insight into forms of American literature written from unfamiliar perspectives, and to understand better the historical and cultural contexts from which such works were written
- To encourage consideration of the notion of "race" as a socially constructed fiction; of how deep and subtle the power of preconceptions of "Others" tend to be; and of how cultural factors intersect with others, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and religious preference
- To gain understanding of a recently emergent scholarly field, "critical whiteness studies"
- To understand the impact on American literary studies of the opening of "the canon" to new literatures, and to explore the historical and theoretical relationships among canonical and non-canonical texts in American literature

**GRADES:** Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

Exam 1	20%
Final exam	25%
1 <sup>st</sup> Formal essay (4-5 pages)	15%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Formal essay (6-8 pages)	25%
Participation/quizzes/attendance	15%

**MISSED QUIZZES, MISSED EXAMS, AND LATE PAPERS:** 1) Because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after quizzes are taken, they cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time. 2) There will also be no makeup exams in this course; if a student misses an exam, the makeup assignment will be a formal, eight-page essay on a topic chosen by the professor. 3) Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in the two essays before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day.

**REGARDING READING:** Since one skill you will be developing in this class is the art of textual analysis, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—take notes as you read, then decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light. Also, as noted above, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will occasionally give "pop" quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings. These quizzes will be unannounced and they cannot be made up. I recognize that some students must be absent at times; accordingly, when I compile your quiz grades at the end of the semester into an average score, I will drop the lowest one—if you miss a quiz, that will be your one dropped quiz. If you don't miss any quizzes, I will still drop your lowest score from your quiz average.

**E-MAIL ACTIVITY:** Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every day, for messages pertaining to the course. You already have a free EIU e-mail account, which I would prefer that you use. You can use a commercial account for this course, but be aware that free web-based accounts (such as Hotmail or Yahoo) sometimes cause problems with listserv subscriptions. Our class discussions may carry over onto the e-mail listserv, and I will occasionally send messages to the entire class. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Getting an e-mail account AND CHECKING IT REGULARLY is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message at the above address by Friday, January 12 at 5:00 p.m. to confirm that you have established an account, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In your message, describe yourself in whatever ways you choose (including your major), and also write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and procedures.

**CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT:** In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. Also, be aware that many sensitive issues tend to arise within a course on multicultural material, so we must respect the opinions of others—try to respond to ideas, rather than to the person stating them. In my opinion, it's okay for discussions to become “heated,” as long as we respect each other as people. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other students have the same question.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** The rule regarding attendance is: be here. I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “daily schedule.” Missing class frequently will lower your final grade as well as your grade on the reading quizzes. In addition, note that coming to class “prepared” means coming to class with that day's assigned reading—anyone who does not have the day's assigned reading with them may be considered absent. Regarding tardiness: this is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily do so by developing the habit of arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this class on time because of other commitments, drop it and take another section. Finally, you are responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Get the telephone number of one or two other students in class, or get a hold of me, so you can find out about any missed assignments *before* you come to class.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Keep in mind, of course, the English Department's policy on plagiarism: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work’ (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”

## ENGLISH 3705: DAILY SCHEDULE

(this schedule may be subject to change; bring the day's reading material to class—  
students who don't do so may be marked absent)

T JAN 9 Introduction to the course and to each other; in-class reading: poems by Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Langston Hughes

R JAN 11 Roediger, *Black on White*, 1-37

F JAN 12 By 5 p.m. today, carefully read the policies and procedures for this course, and then send a message to Dr. Engles (tdengles@eiu.edu): 1) explain which course you are in (English 3705); 2) describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, including your career aspirations; 3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with the course policies and procedures; and 4) as with all e-mail messages, be sure that you "sign" it by adding your name at the end.

T JAN 16 *Black on White*

R JAN 18 *Black on White*

T JAN 23 Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks*

R JAN 25 *The Ways of White Folks*

T JAN 30 *The Ways of White Folks*

R FEB 1 Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

T FEB 6 *Playing in the Dark*

R FEB 8 Wright, *Savage Holiday*

T FEB 13 *Savage Holiday*

R FEB 15 *Savage Holiday*

T FEB 20 **Exam One**

R FEB 22 Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

T FEB 27 *The Bluest Eye*

- **Paper One Due**

R MAR 1 *The Bluest Eye*

T MAR 6 *The Bluest Eye*

R MAR 8 Arturo Islas, *The Rain God*

March 12 – March 16: Spring break!

T MAR 20 *The Rain God*

R MAR 22 *The Rain God*

T MAR 27 Lee, *Native Speaker*

R MAR 29 *Native Speaker*

T APR 3 *Native Speaker*

R APR 5 *Native Speaker*

T APR 10 *Native Speaker* and discussion of final paper

R APR 12 Vikram Seth, *The Golden Gate*

T APR 17 *The Golden Gate*

R APR 19 *The Golden Gate*

T APR 24 *The Golden Gate*

R APR 26 Last day of class

**Final paper due** (final paper due at the beginning of class)

Final Exam: Thursday, May 3, 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.